13

Vav Consecutives or Vav-Prefixed Verbs

13.1   *- 13.1 -*

Hebrew recognises two tenses in its verbal system, namely, the Past and the non-Past, a fact well noted in its long history of the language. The understanding of it in the field of Hebrew study is such that out of these there are two forms of the verb in the Hebrew Bible, the מִקְרָא, appeared rather unique: the vav-prefixed forms of the verb, that is, when an Imperfect Tense (the Imperfect Tense is also used as the Future Tense in Hebrew grammar, discussed in chapter nine) of the verb *yiqtol* (יִקְטֹל), which de facto is the infinitive construct loaded with the pairing of pronominal afformatives (אית״ן) and the sufformatives (יו״נה), and this is further prefixed by the consonant vav [ו] (וְו) and vowelled [⊙Ọ] (פתח+דגש), that somewhat resembled the vowels used in the article [⊙הַ] (הַ), and the combination is labelled as *wayyiqtol* (וַיִּקְטֹל) or simply as Prefix Conjugation (PC): The presence of the dagesh [⊙] (דגש) might add stress to the syllable; and the dagesh forte—in *wayyiqtol* is used in a gemination in order to distinguish between otherwise homophonous words; whereas a perfect form of the verb, a verb in the קָטַל conjugation, or simply known as suffix conjugation (SC) (discussed in chapter twelve) is

וָו–הַהִפּוּךְ *what is your name... ...*		
waw hahipuch		
waw consecutive	וְקָטַל	
waw conversive	*weqatal*	N. W. Schröder, 1766
vav consecutive	*ve-qatal*	
waw of reversal	vav-prefixed perfect	
waw relative		Hitzig 1833
waw inversive		Joüon and Muraoka
וַיִּקְטֹל *wayyiqtol*	we-Vsuff	
	vav+Verb+suffix conjugation	
vav-imperfect	converted perfect	
converted imperfect		
waw inductive		Gell 1821: 76
vav Prefix Conjugation (PC)	vav Suffix Conjugation (SC)	
Past Narrative	Irreal Perfect	John A. Cook, "The vav-prefixed verb forms in Elementary Hebrew Grammar", *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, Volume 8, Article 3, p8
consecutive preterite	və-qatal	Jo Ann Hackett, *Basic intro-duction to Biblical Hebrew*, Hendrickson, 2010, pp90-91.
Believably more names will emerge in the future effort of Hebrew scholarship...		

similarly prefixed by vav [וְ] (וָו), known as *weqatal* (וְקָטַל) (*ve-qatal*) or we-Vsuff (vav+Verb+suffix conjugation), which actually is a Perfect Tense of the verb but merely prefixed by a vav [וְ] (וָו).

13.2

These two are the forms of the verb of what is known in Hebrew grammar textbooks as the vav-conversive/consecutive (וָו–הַהְפּוּךְ) verbs. The current nomenclature of these two verbal forms are diversely dubbed but mostly known as consecutive verbs or simply as PC and SC. Names are many but they all say the same thing. In more recent endeavours badges such as Past Narrative (John Cook ventured to relabel vav-imperfect as Past Narrative; and as Irreal Perfect the vav-prefixed perfect), consecutive preterite (Jo Ann Hackett), etc., were attempted. And all roads lead to Rome!

13.3 A Pinch of History

The perception of these peculiarities was first emerged in the sixteenth century among Jewish grammarians. Ever since, research and investigations into the grammar involving these two forms of the verb had evolved into an active enterprise in Hebrew scholarship of its own right. Extensive research into the historical development of the Hebrew verb, especially cross-linguistic studies, would continue to shed light on the conundrums or intrigues of the Hebrew language. These undertakings are suitable aids but more for theoretical probes than practical usefulness. The Tanakh (תנ"ך) or the מִקְרָא—as we inherit it now—exhibits these two verb-forms, namely, the *qatal* and *yiqtol*; and their seemingly affiliations, that is, the vav-prefixed form for each one of these respectively: *veqatal (weqatal)* and *wayyiqtol*. Proposals are abundant as to the function and meaning of each of these two vav-prefixed verb forms; opinions are equally diverse. As generally the case, theories are mostly provincial—many of them, hence the enigma remained; and no immediate solution is in sight.

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13.4

The Past, the *qatal* and *veqatal*, renders a completed action or an event *fait accompli* or at its endpoint, which inclusive something erupted or emerged and came to a terminus before or right up to the current speech event, the result or consequence of which might or might not be relevant to the speech moment. For the non-Past—the *yiqtol* and *wayyiqtol*,

depicts actions or sequence of events (fientive), unfolding one after the other—immediately after or later, subsequently—in relation to the speech moment or even before the speaking event that could stretch back and forth deep into the future, covering all general conditions.

Side Note

Cited by Giovanni Lenzil in his "Sequences of Verbal Forms and Taxis in Biblical Hebrew", *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, volume 15, Article 8, 2015, p39 mentioned that Samuel Lee voiced his doubt that the vav could have conversive power. In another instance Robert Young in the preface to his literal translation of the Bible opinioned similar view. And more other.

13.5
These two forms of the verb are mostly used in sentences expressing a sequence or a series of actions or multiple actions where the tense of these verbs when unfurled into English translation would generally be referred back to the assumed tense of the main (lexical) verb that initiated the chain of action or sequential events while making constant adjustment and alignment to the requirement of the rule of sequence of tenses

in English grammar, hence the appearance of conversive effect of these verbal forms. The function and purpose of these two forms have been variously appropriated and propagated in textbooks as well as research monographs. It is worth while to bear in mind that the magic of conversion is not done by adding the consonant [וֹ] (וָ) to the verb, which actually is a conjunction, rather it could be a signal that the meaning of the verb must be reckoned differently, probably due to the nature or dynamic of the (fientive) verb, the pensée of which would be assigned to in the following.

13.6 The *wayyiqtol* (וַיִּקְטֹל)—the vav-imperfect
In a given sentence, a verb in the Perfect tense, a *qatal* verb, leading a sequence of Imperfect Tense verbs (יִקְטֹל) but prefixed with vav [וֹ] (וָ)—the vav-imperfect—each of these verbs is termed the vav-consecutive Imperfect, the *wayyiqtol* (וַיִּקְטֹל) or Prefix Conjugation. Often the series of *wayyiqtol*, instead of a Perfect, could be led by וַיְהִי, which itself is a

vav-imperfect of the Hebrew stand-alone verb *to be*: הָיָה. A negative Perfect—the "Perfect + וְלֹא" (←read this way)—could punctuate the series and the verb immediately following this negation would resume the vav-imperfect chain until the end of the sentence or termination of the paragraph. As such a sentence could likewise begin with a *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל) verb, particularly common is the verb וַיֹּאמֶר (*and he set forth to say*), which initiates a next section in the discourse. The general advice offered in textbooks is to translate the vav-consecutive Imperfect Tense, the *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל), that is the vav-imperfect verb, as Past Tense in English or its quivalent with a semantic idea of a temporal succession or consequentiality or sequential or perhaps resultant of the action while sharing the same tense as that of the main verb in the independent clause preceding it in the same sentence, perhaps even of the whole paragraph, is not at all unfounded. The role of the *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל) is diversely understood. Without rehearsing the long history of research on the matter, the morphology or the composition of *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל), at its base, apart from the personal pronoun prefixes and suffixes, is in fact an Infinitive Construct but prefixed with the vav [וְ] (וְו) consonant to the Imperfect Tense third person masculine singular. In short, the *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל) is a vav-prefixed Future Tense (יקטל), a *yiqtol* (יקטל) or a short *yiqtol*, the Jussive, (discussed in chapter eight), as some would have it that way, which indicates a rolling-ball like action that could take place at any moment later or in the future after the main action or, all the more, events (fientive)—as sort of a posterior—in relation to the preceding Past Tense or simply another lead verb. It is termed in textbooks as a tense but embedded with it no immediate reference as to the nature of its time: punctiliar time, beginning time or ending time nor a terminus could be inferred, to exhibit a tint of its non-finite quality. In this sense the *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל), in the oft quoted words of S. R. Driver, does not stand in isolation but a continuation or development from its previous past as signified in the past-tense verb in the matter of its potential tenses, moods or aspects.

13.7
Given the nature of the Hebrew language, unlike English and

some Indo-European languages, there being available no arsenal of auxiliaries in its repertoire from which to draw upon to configure the verb into various aspects in places where the rule of sequence of tenses might be used and furthermore coupled with the absence of an exact-time scheme as in English, or sharing the same time reference in the sentence, Hebrew appeared to be handicapped particularly when it comes to the articulation of matters such as pluperfect or modality of permission, possible or potential actions. There is a pluperfect in Greek grammar. Quite rightly the Septuagint would manage *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל) verbs differently. Very likely in the mind of the native Hebrew speaker, *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל) and *veqatal* (וקטל) do not serve any of those roles in the first place presumed by grammar textbooks; merely to indicate that the action or event of a *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל) verb as a follow-up action or event (fientive) after the Past or Perfect—*qatal* (וקטל) verb or even another *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל), where the event per se could jolly well be an indication of an exact time in the sense of suchlike in English grammar. By virtue of the nature of events coming in a succession one after another in time, therefore, tense is embedded in its sequence. In the absence of sophisticated calendar system readily available to an average household in ancient days, events, and probably the memories of them, marked the passage of time as the way ancient people perceived the world in thought and feeling that formed, in a very broad stroke, an element in the grammar for their articulation. The Hebrew Bible, the מִקְרָא, is a collection of testimonies and memories—episodic, semantic and so on—of those events in time and space, which glued the people together in the community. Events, comming in sequence one after another, entailed inherently an element of time/tense, when transformed into languages and thought forms outside the Hebrew language—indeed most, if not all—*wayyiqtol* (ויקטל) verbs when translating into English, which is a tense sensitive language, cascades along choices and decision oscillating between preterite (simple past), perfect (past or present perfect) or pluperfect on the one hand and copulative perfect or copula on the other. Cognitive linguistics has it that thought world and language reciprocally shapes and reinforces each other in the memories of what

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YHVH, interacting with His people, said, did or did not do, and how helps came—memory and reminiscence of their past of private anecdotes and community episodes enabled them to foresee and predict the future. Those that had been encoded in writings—became the focus and attention of the people of the Book their self-understanding, their role and identity in the world: Meaning—perception, thoughts, feelings—create its own grammar. Whereas rendering into English, for instance, the demand of the rule of sequence of tenses required various time-related helping verbs, by way of the auxiliaries, must be on tour of duty; hence the seemingly conversive role of the *wayyiqtol* emerged: fun time for the auxiliaries; notwithstanding the ongoing research done on the history of *wayyiqtol* and the vav consecutive.

13.8
Taking the first few verses of Genesis as a point for grammatical meditation, namely, the sentences depicting creation of the first day in the Book of Genesis. From the perspective of the narrator, the three past-tense verbs, namely, הָיְתָה קָרָא ,בָּרָא, could be seen more of being placed at the same hierarchy in terms of simultaneity; and the topics: הָאָרֶץ, הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְחֹשֶׁךְ, תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ are sharing the same level of hierarchy as that of the three past-tense verbs. The paragraph seeks to explain the presence of darkness, heaven and earth. Placing וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לָיְלָה at the end of the section before the on-set of the next petuchah (פְּתוּחָה) does not assign darkness to a minute position; rather, darkness is seen there at the beginning in the same time-event ranking as וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם, הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ. A perspicacious deduction leads to that the *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל) verbs hinted that all other cosmic entities emerged, created or otherwise took place as later events that follow up, sequential or consequential, to the principal verbs neutral in time-aspect-mood but without benefit of the auxiliaries. Speech and written language run in a linear fashion while the act of creation occurs simultaneously, that is, the calling of darkness as night, an event, takes place at the same 'time' as the creating of the heavens and the earth. At least, it is believed that the consciousness of it is in the mind of the narrator to align time with the ordering of events,

חרה
לילה
שרה
חם

both local and cosmic. In this way, the three past-tense verbs used in the first day of creation in Genesis suggested that darkness being called night was done at the same time at the creation of the heavens and the earth; and that sequential events marked a demarcation of time in grammar as well as in life or a mental time, at least. Speaking and conversation in dialogue in this way is seen as an event (fientive). וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים is a speech event—*and God set forth to speak*—in words as well as in grammar, marking the endpoint or onset—the past, perfect or pluperfect or hereafter, namely, the future—progressive or otherwise, until it is terminated by a *veqatal*, which largely signals the end-point of a series or chain of events in a petuchah or discourse.

13.9

Distinctively, verbs encapsulated in *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל), such as *to perish, to call, to say, to exist, to see, to send, to shout, to mount, to answer, to arrive, to die, to hear,* and the like, come under the categories of verbs of movement extending from the human body. These verbs, by the nature of their lexical semantics, are usually intransitive, irregular, stative verbs (Hebrew stative verb is discussed in chapter four; and for Hebrew intransitive verbs, way back in 1903, Frank R. Blake offered a list of Hebrew intransitive verbs, several hundred of them, in his "The So-Called Intransitive Verbal Forms in Hebrew", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1903, Vol. 24 (1903), pp. 145-204.), or in some cases dual nature, that is, dynamic and stative at the same time; and motion verbs— moving from one place to another; and having an

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A sample of French *être* verbs (make a quick comparision with wayyiqtol verbs) that the verb to be is used with the past participle. These are intransitive verbs. Compare these verbs with those that are used to form the *wayyiqtol* in Hebrew would be insifghtful to the understanding of vav-prefixed verbs.

aller	to go
arriver	to arrive
descendre	to descend / to go downstairs
redescendre	to descend again
entrer	to enter
rentrer	to re-enter
monter	to climb
remonter	to climb again
mourir	to die
naître	to be born
partir	to leave

adjectival quality in the meaning. Treatment of these unaccusative verbs in the Perfect Tense in some Indo-European languages such as French and German, unlike English instead of the auxiliary verb *to have* as what we have it now, the auxiliary copular verb *to be* would be used, known as *être* verbs in French (verbs are conjugated with *être* because they are intransitive) or *sein* verbs in the case of German. Even in English, there are sentences, for instance: *He*

A small smaple of *sein* verbs in German and the past pastiriple is used to form the German Perfect Tense; and these are intransitive verbs.		
sterben	die	Gestorben
steigen	climb	Gestiegen
sein	be	Gewesen
Rennen	run	Gerannt
werden	become	Geworden
Gebren	be born	Geboren
gehen	go	Gegangen
passieren	happen	Passiert

is come; He is risen, compare: He has come; He has risen, they were fallen asleep, a child is born, and so on, where the auxiliary copular verb *to be* is used, generally, in intransitive predicates. By the time of Middle English, it seems, the bare infinitive form of the verb *to have* paring with a past participle, the auxiliary perfect *has/ have/had* construction (for unergative verbs) to compose the Perfect Tense has been the main stream and ever since; hence we have now in modern English: *He has come* instead *He is come*. For sure these categories of verbs are not identical among these languages.

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13.10

An astute definition of the English stative verbs, as compared with dynamic verbs, that these are verbs of which meaning concern about action in the mind or a mental state of the speaker, such as *to agree, to love, to believe, to be,* among others. Most, if not all, stative verbs have an adjectival quality in its meaning. On the other hand, a dynamic verb describes an action or event, which can begin and finish at a punctiliar moment or a point of time implied in the principal verb. The stative verbs in English grammar are not used in to form the continuous tenses: the Present Continuous Tense and the Past Continuous tense. A tentative note could be made that *wayyiqtol*

(וִיקטֹל) verbs or verbs used in the formation of what is tagged as vav-prefixed verbs, a good number of them, fall under the category of stative verbs; and these verbs required different grammatical treatment in the absence of schematic auxiliaries in Hebrew. Deficiency in our understanding of the whole spectrum of *wayyiqtol* (וִיקטֹל) verbs would not sustain a definite conclusion on the matter. Just a point of curiosity: What sort of scenario would we have if there were in Hebrew an inventory of auxiliaries similar to that of Indo-European languages. Furthermore, unlike English, when a sentence of which meaning falls under any of the semantic category of situation, condition, quality, relationship, availability (the mere existence of something) and general truth, Hebrew does not necessarily enlist a copular verb or link verb—hence verbless clause—such as the extensive use of the verb *to be* in English, which is mandatory. In addition, sentence expressing a simple possession or ownership, it seems, might not enroll a verb *to have*, to elucidate, 1 Samuel 1:2 ב וְלֹו שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים (literally: and to/for him two wives…). As the sentence stands in Hebrew, there is no verb in this segment, leading by a conjunctive preposition, to imply possessive in meaning; and it makes no sense under syntactic rules in English grammar. (A little bit more on English and Hebrew auxiliaries is made available in the following Chapter 14.) In the gymnasium of translation, verb *to have* expressing a sense of possession or ownership must come to play, thus: *He has/had two wivies*. Believably, the crux of the matter is not so much of the conversive effect of the vav-prefixed verbs; very likely, the issue lies in the nature of the Hebrew verbs being caught up in a protracted process of verbification of the adjectives, nouns and statives, that coupled with the absence of an underdevelopment of the auxiliaries of the perfect and the copula in Hebrew by which the perfective past or copulative perfect would otherwise be constructed in the way history of language would witness it in some Indo-European languages.

13.11 The *veqatal/weqatal* (וְקָטַל)—the vav-perfect
A chain of verbs in the Perfect the *qatal* (קָטַל) prefixed with vav [וֹ] (וְו) consonant, the vav-perfect, in each of these—widely known as the *veqatal* (וְקָטַל)—is also designated as vav-consecutive

Perfect or sometimes as we-Vsuff. The series could be led by an Imperfect Tense verb at the head of the sequence or וְהָיָה, which is the *veqatal* (וקטל) of הָיָה, the independent Hebrew verb *to be*. The *veqatal* (וקטל) marked an endpoint of an action or an event *fait accompli* or a chain of them. By virtue of its dynamic as a terminus it is thus perfective in nature while the *qatal* (קָטַל) is rather definitely a Past Tense, as in Judges 1:16 טז וּבְנֵי קֵינִי חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה עָלוּ מֵעִיר הַתְּמָרִים, then followed by a shift of events in the second part of the sentence: וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶת־הָעָם, queuing after a Past Tense, in which case when rendering it into English the rule of sequence of tenses must be in the game; by itself in Hebrew, event is neutral in terms of tense, mood and aspect. The *qatal* (קטל) could possibly take up the role equivalent to a Past Participle in English, as in Judges 1:2 ב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה יְהוּדָה יַעֲלֶה: הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ בְּיָדוֹ. thus the auxiliary *have* came into play in most of the English translations. The *veqatal* (וקטל)—the vav-perfect verb—might assume an Imperative role when following an Imperative when translating to English, as in Judges 1:15; Isaiah 20:2, etc. טו וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ הָבָה־לִּי בְרָכָה, כִּי אֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב נְתַתָּנִי, וְנָתַתָּה לִי גֻּלֹּת מָיִם; (Judges 1:15)

13.12

As there is no provision in English grammar to accommodate the category of dynamic verbs that speak of an event such as that in Hebrew without involving laboriously employment of the auxiliaries (auxiliary *have,* modality, copula *be,* as well as verbless, zero copula, sentence), and motivated by the requirement of the rule of sequence of tenses, which is paramount in English grammar, and a seemingly ambiguous pluperfect, hence translation of *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל) and *veqatal* (וקטל) from Hebrew to English—largely done at the discretion of the translator, sort of *laissez-faire* where no definite rules have been fully and maturely developed as yet notwithstanding of voluminous research done on the topics—appears confusing and such endeavour must constantly be making adjustment to the imperatives of English grammar, which is very sensitive to tense/time—punctiliar time,

aspect and mood, and so forth, while keeping a close watch over the semantic context of the sentence. In Hebrew, the *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל) and the *veqatal* (וקטל), at least, do not necessary assume those roles assigned by grammarians: they are more of expressing the existence or occurrence of events as stipulated by the lexical meaning, sort of coming into being of such events that were enshrined in their religious archives—the holy Mikra. Without prejudice, thoughts and reflections here are nothing more than mere conjecture and tentative as well.

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